By Russ Pankonin
The Imperial Republican

Organizers of the Nebraska Chapter of the Great Western Cattle Trail Association made it official by signing their articles of incorporation on Nov. 8.

The Great Western Cattle Trail Association is a non-pro-fit organization whose mission is to preserve and promote the unique heritage and culture of the cattle drives up the Western Trail in the later 1800s.

They are working to create a positive economic impact and awareness for the entire Great Western Cattle Trail regions stretching from Mexico to Canada.

The group would like to market this trail as a heritage tourism destination.

The newly-formed Nebraska chapter will extend the work of the national organization.

Several locations in south-west Nebraska are sites of the trails used long ago.

The goal of the local Nebraska chapter is to mark these locations so visitors could find these monuments while traveling through the area.

Similar chapters exist in other cattle states along the trail including Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Wyoming, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota.

The idea to form a Nebraska chapter originated with the Southwest Nebraska RC&D before it's funding was cut and operation downsized.

One of the members of the SWRC&D board, Ted Tietjen of Grant, continued to press the idea and gathered area support to form the chapter.

He and Harold Potthoff of Trenton serve as co-chairs of the chapter. Pam Potthoff, also of Trenton, serves as secretary.

Other charter members of the group include Marvin Large and John Osler of Imperial, Bill Zahl of Stratton, Bryan Trimble of Ogallala and Tom Krause of Madrid.

Tietjen said one of their primary goals is to work with landowners along the trail and area

historical societies to erect markers along the roadside indicating the path of the trail.

He noted the trail passed through a number of areas in Dundy, Chase and Perkins Counties on the way to Ogallala.

He said the trail also continued into South Dakota to get beef to the miners working there.

Great Western Cattle Trail

The Great Western Cattle Trail, which is also referred to as the Texas Trail, crossed through a number of midwest states.

In 1874, Captain John T. Lytle and several cowboys left South Texas with 3,500 head of longhorn cattle and a herd of saddle horses.

Five years later, the route Lytle cut out of the prairie to Ft. Robinson, Nebraska, had become the most significant and traveled cattle trail in history—the Great Western Cattle Trail.

Though less well known than the Chisholm trail, the Great Western Cattle Trail was longer in length and carried cattle for two years longer than the Chisholm.

The Great Western Cattle Trail saw more than seven million cattle and horses pass through Texas and Oklahoma to railheads in Kansas and Nebraska—an important factor in developing the cattle industry as far north as Wyoming and Montana.

Established in 1878, Doan's Crossing was known on the trail as "the jumping off place." It was the last place to get mail and supplies before entering Indian Territory.

Today, the 1881 adobe building, still standing at Doan's, is the oldest structure in Wilbarger County, Texas.

Traffic on the Great Western Cattle Trail began to decline in 1885 with the introduction of barbed wire and legislation calling for a quarantine of Texas cattle due to "Texas Fever," a disease caused by a parasitic tick.

In 1893 the last large cattle drive up the Great Western Trail crossed the Red River heading to Deadwood, S.D. By this time an estimated seven million cattle and one million horses had crossed the river at Doan's Crossing and moved up the trail.

In the 1930s two markers were set at Doan's to commemorate the historical significance of the area.

In 2003 a project was launched to mark the entire Great Western Cattle Trail with a cement post placed every six miles along the trail from the Rio Grande to Ogallala.

Oklahoma set the first post south of the city of Altus near the Red River. The first post in Texas was set in 2004 during the 121st Doan's May Day Picnic at the Doan's adobe.